

God's Grace and Mercy

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Date: 11 June 2017

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[0 : 0 0] for a little to the chapter that we read, a very well-known chapter, Hebrews chapter 4. I want us to consider this last section of the chapter, really from verse 8 to the end.

For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, pushing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give an account. Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens.

Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who is in every respect has been tempted, as we are yet without sin.

[1 : 2 0] Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. It has been, and we have said it often enough before, the Old Testament has been described as God's picture book, because it is full of incidents and experiences that highlight to us so much of what the New Testament is about, where God's people going through different things, the lessons, the spiritual lessons there are very clear, very instructive for us.

And that's what we find in the book of Hebrews. Hebrews, of course, was written to converted Jews. They had the background. These were people who had that. That is why it is such a, you, the book of Hebrews is a book that you can really read on top of the Levitical law, and the whole priesthood and everything that happened in there, because the people who this letter were written to were Jews who understood and knew the whole workings of the Old Testament.

And so they were able to understand in a way and in a measure that few others could, just all the symbolism and all that everything was pointing to and being fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Now, as we know, one of the great essentials of the Christian faith is belief. And it is something that's highlighted so often in the Bible, the importance of belief.

In fact, it is the, we could almost say it's the key word. When the Philippian jailer asked Paul, what must I do to be saved?

[3 : 1 3] He's really saying, look, out of all the things in this world, what have I to do? Paul, remember, said to him, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.

So, in a sense, belief is the key, key word, it's the key factor. Now, we know, of course, that there are so many other aspects to it, but this is the one essential belief.

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, of course, we know that that believing, that trusting, takes many levels, because there is an initial believing where we come to faith in Jesus Christ, where we believe, we accept everything the Bible says of him.

But it's not just an accepting with our mind, but there's a resting of our heart in the truth that we know. That doesn't mean to say that we know everything about Jesus.

It doesn't mean to say that we understand everything that the Bible highlights to us and for us. But we know sufficient to be able to say, I accept Jesus.

[4 : 24] I am resting my case in him. This is the one I am giving my life. This is the one I trust my life to. I have come to a place where I realize I can't save myself.

I can't go through life on my own. You know, it's funny. I've said it before, but when I was converted, there was a man I remember said to me, somebody who is very opposed to the gospel, and he says, I cannot believe that you've gone down this road.

He said, I thought you were strong enough in yourself that you didn't need this crutch to go through life. That's the way he looked at it. And you know, to a certain extent, there's an element of truth in that.

Because when you become a Christian, it's one of the things you realize is that you can't do it yourself. That you're not strong enough on your own. That you need another.

And it is this where we are prepared to put our own life in the hand of another. And that's the hardest thing we can do. Because we want to be in control.

[5 : 33] It's natural to us. We want to be in control of our own lives. And we want to be in control of different people at different levels want to be in control. But it's natural to all of us to want to be in control.

And that is why salvation, in many ways, is so hard. Because it is a handing over of ourselves to the authority and the leadership and the control of someone else.

It's a submitting of ourselves. So this is what happens when we believe. We come to believe in and say, right, Jesus, I accept you for who you are.

And I accept what you have done. And I am happy to submit to your kingship, to the work of your priesthood, and to believe all your word has been the rule for my life.

So belief is, we would say, the key to the Christian life. unbelief, but we all know too well how unbelief can come into our hearts and into our lives.

[6 : 41] Now, again, we know that unbelief works at different levels. And there's a, for the believer, the person who comes to faith in Jesus Christ, real fundamental lostness of unbelief, the unbelief that causes people to be apart from Christ will never again be part of your life.

There will never be that level of unbelief that you had before. But there can still be levels of unbelief where we don't trust the Lord in the way that we should, where we doubt his providence, where we doubt his workings.

We become impatient and we're wondering, has he forgotten? And I'm sure we've all gone through times like that in our own lives and we've expected the Lord to work.

We believe he's going to work and he's not. He's not doing what we expected. Now, that is where faith is tested. That's where faith is tried.

And this is where it's so important for us to say, right, Lord, even although the picture is dark, even although it appears nothing is happening, give me the grace to wait because I know you're going to work.

[8 : 02] And that's where we see so often, I suppose that's why Abraham is termed the father of the faithful because there's so many aspects to Abraham's life but Abraham was tried and tested and tested and tested and tested.

Sometimes he failed but so often he didn't fail. He was a great man, a great, great man of faith. But faith is essential and that all of you here today following the Lord, it's the one thing you're able to say.

You might be saying, you know, there's times as Christians I've limped. There's times I feel I'm standing still. There's times that I'm ashamed of how I've been as a Christian but this one thing is I'm still following the Lord.

There's nobody else I want. There's nobody else who's there in front of me but the Lord. And so that points to the faith, the belief that is still part of your life.

Now the apostle is writing here and he's talking of the Christian's rest and he's saying that yes, there's a struggle going on within the Christian life but there is a rest and he uses two examples of rest and the first example that he uses earlier on is God's rest on the Sabbath day.

[9 : 26] We find that in verse 4 and God rested on the seventh day from all his works. Now we make a grave mistake if we think that the Sabbath day is something that is purely tied up in the ceremonial law and that it has no bearing or binding upon us today.

The Christian Sabbath as we know is the first day of the week. This is something that goes right back into creation. God set this example.

God created this world in six days and on the seventh he rested from all his works. And this is a day that he sanctified, he set apart and that's why it's become a holy day.

It's a day and of course we know with the rising of Jesus on the first day of the week and the way that the early church met on the first day of the week that this now has become the Christian Sabbath.

And it is important for us, it's important for our body, our mind and our soul and individually and nationally we suffer if we think that we can push what God in his wisdom has given to us if we can think that we can push that aside.

[10 : 39] But the rest of the Sabbath is so important. And again the other rest that was spoken of here as an example was the rest of Canaan. Israel, remember, had been in Egypt that was a place of captivity, of bondage, of turmoil, of slavery.

But they were taken out of that and the promise was of entering into the rest of Canaan. Now of course we know that when they arrived in Canaan eventually it was anything but rest.

There was a lot of conflict, a lot of battles and so on but compared to Egypt it was a rest. And we can look at Canaan in different ways. There are different pictures held out to us about Canaan.

But we know that part and this is all that's tied into this chapter part of Israel's problem that was a major part of all their journeys through the wilderness was unbelief.

And that unbelief prevented them getting into the promised land when they should have. It didn't ultimately prevent them. God's covenant with them his promise to them was such that they would get in but a generation died in the wilderness with the exception of Joshua and Caleb.

[11 : 55] It was the younger generation that got in because remember they grumbled they complained all the time they refused to believe what God had said.

They had seen the miracles and the wonders of Egypt they had been taken through the Red Sea they had seen the extraordinary miraculous wall of water on either side and they went through on the ground on the bed of the Red Sea and yet they refused to believe that the Lord could take them into Canaan and defeat their enemies.

And in the end the Lord said remember their prayer would to God would to God that we die in this wilderness would to God that we were still in Egypt that's what they were saying and the Lord took them at their word.

Be careful what you say be careful even what you think in your heart because sometimes the Lord will give us what we ask for in our folly and that was so and in our unbelief because we can say things in unbelief that are so wrong and if the Lord takes us at our word.

Remember Rachel I said Rachel she cried give me give me children or I die and she died giving birth. You know we've got to be careful what we pray for and that's we find that the Lord took Israel at their word but they are set out just an example before us yes who God will fulfill his promise but they didn't get the initial rest that they had been looking forward to because of their unbelief.

[13 : 44] So there's this warning to us against the sin of unbelief. You know it's one of the greatest sins. We look at our lives and we're often guilty I suppose of categorizing particular sins and we say oh well poor that's a really bad sin.

Well that's not quite so bad a sin. You know one of the worst sins that we can be guilty of is the sin of unbelief because it is doubting the very nature and the very character of God.

It strikes at who God is and I don't think we take on board just how serious a sin it is because so often we look at the table of the law and we look at murder and stealing and adultery and all these kind of things and we look at them and the way they work out and maybe we come even to sins of anger and hatred and bitterness and all these yeah they're all sins but the unbelief strikes at the very nature and character of God in a way and in a measure maybe that some other sins don't and we often minimize it and sort of we maybe don't think as badly as we should and so when we're asking the Lord to forgive us our sins ask to be forgiven for the sin of unbelief because this is where we're doubting his care of us doubting his love to us where we're doubting his providential work where we doubt his very character and his very nature so as we say unbelief is a serious serious sin and that's why there are so many warnings in scripture against it but then we again at home sin on the rest that is given to

God's people and we're told then in verse 11 let us therefore strive to enter to enter that rest now when we come into rest with God or the rest of God in this world it comes in two ways because when we come to faith in God we receive immediately a rest and this rest is manifested to us in the form of peace because peace and rest go side by side you cannot really rest when everything around you and about you where there's no peace and when a person comes to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ it's like the battle is over the battle of enmity against God the battle of running away from God and you know it's exhausting one of the wonderful things people say when they come to faith when they come to an assurance of their faith is the sense of peace the sense of rest and that's because they've stopped fighting against God and you cannot be at peace and you cannot experience rest when you're running and fighting but that's what we do by nature like Adam ran from

God and we've never stopped running from God until God draws us to himself and so this is where we first this is the first peace that we have we're at peace with God because we are now justified we're told that in the Bible that when we are justified we have peace with God but we're not just at peace with God but we experience the peace of God not just peace with God but peace of God and that's where our heart is flooded with that peace where we come to experience as we're told in the scripture the peace of God that passeth all understanding so to enter heaven for the Christian even although we've said all that it does require labouring because that's what we're told let us therefore labour or strive to enter that rest now having talked about the restlessness that is part and partial of our lives before we come to faith in

[18 : 03] Jesus Christ when we come to faith in Jesus Christ although we now have peace and are at rest at one level until we experience the full rest which is laid up for the people of God we're still at war it's just like Canaan when they went into Canaan although it was a land of promise there was still they still had to conquer the land and so it is for ourselves we come into faith in Jesus Christ as we've said we've come to peace and rest but it's a token rest it's a peace the yes that we have in our heart it is real but it's a foretaste of an everlasting peace a full peace a complete peace where every everything that can disturb our peace will be removed from us hard to imagine but that is how it will be so we are told that we have to labor to or strive to enter into this rest and we're told there that for the word of

God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword just look at this briefly because I think we looked at this not too long ago but it tells us here that the word of God is living and active now our words when we speak them if we speak one to another they're living they're active but our words don't carry the element of life that the words of God carry because we are speaking in the present in our relevant situation for instance when Jesus said to the crowd come unto me all you that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest he spoke to the people who were there round about him but here we are over two thousand years later since Jesus actually spoke those words and they were recorded for us and they come to us today with all the reality and all the relevance and all the authority and indeed all the power that they were when they were first spoken because the word of

God is living it is active it comes with all that force with all that power and God is always doing something he is because he himself is living he is active his word is a creating word see it at the very beginning that's all he said I often marvel at that and it gives us an idea of the awesome power of God in the beginning God and then we read God said let there be let there be light let there be this let there be that and it came into being spoken to the nothingness into the void into the emptiness and brought into being by the word of his power it's extraordinary and this is the same word we're not talking about something just that was a way something historical that happened we are living in the very world that the word of God brought into being so we are tied up where we are right now in that word as it was spoken way way way back but not only is it a word that brings into being it's a word that upholds we are being upheld because God has put a time limit on this world that nobody knows when it's going to come to an end but we're told in scripture it is but in the meantime he is upholding this world he has set laws into nature for instance the law of gravity and all these sort of things there are laws there are seasons

God is the one who has set these things in motion but of course we know that because of the fall the whole world is groaning there's chaos in this world God is not the order of chaos the one who orders chaos but it is the fall because the fall didn't just affect the human race it affected the whole creation we're told in scripture the creation is groaning there's a groan coming out of the creation and we see it in the volcanic eruptions we see it in the tsunamis we see it in the earthquakes and all these things speaking to us of the groaning that has been brought about through the fall into our creation creation but one day the elements are going to melt with a fervent heat we're told that and the Lord alone knows when that is so he's going to bring an end to this world as we know it but there will be new heavens and a new earth and in them will dwell righteousness but in the meantime his word is upholding everything he has set into being and his word is the word that creates light and life in our hearts it's the same word that brought into being at the very beginning that has brought light and life into your soul and that is why it is so humbling there are times that we stop and we think and when you think and you look up at the stars at night and the moon and when you look at the beauty of this creation and you say to yourself the word of God brought this into being and it's the same

God whose word has brought salvation into my life see everything is linked everything is tied up and it's the most humbling thing to reflect and to stop and to realize so this word is we're told it is sharp sharper than any two edged sword it cuts either way it never fails to work and it goes right into the very depth of our being it reaches a place where a surgeon's scalpel can't surgeons can do amazing things with scalpels but they can't get into the thoughts and the intents of our heart but the Lord can and his word goes in there and it reaches right into the depth of our being in ways that nothing else can and you know the solemn thing about God's word is that it's doing one of two things God's word we're told here it's a knife other times we're told it's a hammer different descriptions given but it's either softening or hardening it we're told it's a savor of life and to life or death and to death do you know it's possible for a passion to become hardened under the word I think that's one of the most solemn things that can happen where a passion rather than being softened is hardening under the word pray to the

[25 : 27] Lord that that will never ever happen to you but that your heart will be softened that it will become soft in God's hand receptive to his truth pray to the Lord Lord please please may it never happen to me that I will become hard under your word may it be that I will be softened that I will be open to your truth that your truth will indeed change my life my all but then we see that the Lord as God of heaven and earth that he knows and he sees absolutely everything about us verse 13 no creature is hidden from his sight but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give an account it's quite an extraordinary thing everything is being noted by the Lord every single thing I think people forget that we forget it and I often think it must be one of the most disturbing and frightening things when you think of people that God has given great gifts of intelligence and understanding and energy and yet these people use the very gifts that God has given to them in order to try and to disprove the very existence of the

God who has given them life and upholds her life in this world that there are people who are putting all their energy into writing and into talking and into working in what they can do to try and prove that God doesn't exist and to try and remove every evidence that there is of God they cannot but you know the day is coming when they're going to have to give an account of what they've done imagine standing before the Lord and saying I used all the resources that you gave me in this life to try and prove you don't exist can you think of anything more awful everybody is going to have to appear before that judgment seat all the tyrants of this world but all the ordinary people like you and me we will all have to and the books will be opened and the sentence will be passed either of life either people will be accepted remember it's like a court scene and everybody needs an advocate and we're told in the

Bible there is only one advocate Jesus Christ the righteous if we have Jesus Christ the righteous as our advocate on that day we will be openly acknowledged and acquitted and we will be called to enter into the joy of the Lord if we don't have the advocate Jesus Christ then we have nobody to stand for us to plead on our behalf we're all on our own undone and the sentence will eternally be passed upon us the sentence the sentence of death but it's a sentence of life imprisonment and it's a fearful thought but we are then told following on from that since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens Jesus the son of God let us hold fast our confession the time is moving just very briefly and as we said

Paul is writing to Jewish Christians who understand all the Old Testament remember the high priest was the great representative between the people and God and if we can think of one particular day it was the great day of atonement and you remember on that day of how the high priest sacrificed in front of all the people were gathered together and he took the blood of the sacrifice and he entered into the holy of holies the most holy place he was only allowed to go in there once a year and it was into the presence of God he went and it was there he sprinkled the blood on the mercy seat and there were the the crowd were waiting outside to see if he would come back out if he came back out it meant that God had accepted the sacrifice and the blood and the work that had been made on their behalf if he didn't come back out then that would be the end of that but we knew he would come out because it was God's appointed way and this is exactly what Jesus

Christ has done Jesus is the great high priest remember writing to the Jews who understood all this and this is how we see Jesus is now the great high priest and on Calvary's cross Jesus was entering with his blood we were seeing the outside the actual sacrifice all the people were witnessing the sacrifice they weren't seeing what was going on behind the scenes like into the holy of holies because Jesus was presenting his blood before the father and because this was the way the father had appointed the father is accepting the work of Jesus where the blood is being presented and then as a token of the acceptance of that work Jesus rises from the dead he appears to his disciples he ascends into heaven in the presence of his disciples he reappears to the likes of

[31 : 28] Saul of Tarsus and the apostle John as the risen exalted Christ he is the great high priest who has passed into the heavens for us and because of all that then we are told to hold fast our confession and to hold fast means that we have to cling on tightly it involves effort because we know that it is a difficult course that we go through but then we read for we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are yet without sin and isn't this wonderful here we are we're laboring we're struggling we're striving and we're saying to the Lord Lord thank you for saving me I know what you prepared for me but from here to that point when you will take me out of this world it's sometimes tough it's sometimes hard going

Lord I know that your grace you promise is sufficient for me but please every day help me and so we go to the Lord and we're praying to him and we're saying Lord help me and for some days it's really tough this is a great verse which assures us that God the second person of the Godhead doesn't just know our struggles because he is the God who has made us and understands our makeup but he is also the God who has come down the Emmanuel God with us who has been in all points it's extraordinary isn't it who has been in all points in every respect tempted us we are yet without sin so our great high priest today understands everything he understands the pains of our body because Jesus understood pain and felt pain they say that crucifixion was one of the worst deaths that any person could possibly die and he experienced it all the human torment that a person can experience in their body and mind he experienced it all the assaults of the evil one he was slandered he was vilified he was beaten he endured everything and it doesn't matter what you experience maybe today you know that people are speaking unkindly of you or maybe somebody is completely misunderstanding you and it's hurting you you can go to

Jesus and say oh lord will you help me you know what it's like you were so misunderstood in this world you know it so helps when you can go to somebody who can identify exactly with where you're at well that's what we have in Jesus he's a sympathetic high priest because he knows your pain he knows what it's like he knows all these different things and so we find that he understands us and because of this we are then able to go to him with a confidence that's what it says let us then with confidence as a result of that knowing that he is a faithful knowing that he is a sympathetic to our weaknesses we know then that we have confidence to go to him the confidence that is spoken of here is having the courage and confidence to speak with somebody who is of a higher rank than us that's that's what's caught up in this word where we have the confidence and the courage to go to somebody who is of a higher rank than we are and that's how it is with the lord because when you stop and you think you say to yourself will god hear me have i the right can i go to the creator of heaven and earth the possessor of heaven and earth everything of this world belongs to him the one who counts the number of the stars he names them one by one the billions of stars he knows he made them the cattle on a thousand hills belong to him he's a possessor of all this earth can i go to him yes we have all the confidence a reverent approach but we can go to him and tell him exactly how it is and this is what we're told that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need isn't that wonderful we're always in need of mercy and we're told he delights in mercy you know when you go to the lord and you say oh lord please be merciful to me you don't need to question and say i wonder if he will because he is our god who delights in being merciful mercy isn't a strange work it is what he delights in doing being merciful he delights in being gracious he's a god who is full of grace it's not that just that he has a little grace he is full of grace and truth and he loves to give of his grace so may we have that confident courage yet with reverence and godly fear where we're able to approach this throne and he's on the throne of grace today giving out lavishly of his mercy and of his grace may we go and may we discover it may we never stop or tire of going to him and discovering his gracious mercy towards us let us pray oh lord our god we again give you thanks for your mercy and your grace towards us we give thanks oh lord for the amazing way in which you work so individually and so personally within our lives lord grant

us your strength for every duty that is before us grant us lord your grace as we journey through this world and oh lord be merciful to us as sinners take away from us our sin and take us home safely we pray in jesus name we ask all amen we're going to conclude singing in this 34th psalm psalm number 34 psalm 34 verse 19 on boe njir gambel kri a bro j kri t restricted by ¶¶

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[41 : 32] CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS Amen.